

**TESTIMONY OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE ISIAH LEGGETT
ON THE PLANNING BOARD DRAFT OF THE WHITE FLINT MASTER PLAN**

October 20, 2009

Good evening Council President Andrews and members of the Council. My name is Diane Schwartz Jones and I am pleased to provide testimony on behalf of County Executive Leggett on the White Flint Sector Plan.

County Executive Leggett supports the basic tenets of the draft White Flint Sector Plan. As Mr. Leggett stated in his comments on the draft Sector Plan, this Plan – with its orientation to the White Flint and Grosvenor Metro Stations and MD355, and with its reuse of acres of asphalt parking lots -- is a paradigm of smart growth. With its street grid system and mixed use focus, this Plan properly aims at reducing the number of vehicle miles travelled as an output for growth in this area. The County Executive fully supports this approach. White Flint is an increasingly urban area and the draft Plan shifts the auto-centric focus of existing development to a walkable and transit oriented community aimed at encouraging pedestrian and bicycle activity.

The proposed density of the Plan is set at a level to justify significant redevelopment. This area will become an important jobs center and economic engine for the County. If the White Flint area redevelops as envisioned by the draft plan the potential fiscal impact is quite significant with an average annual net fiscal impact from build-out of approximately \$131 Million.

The Sector Plan is supported by a collaborative of property owners, some of whom have indicated that they are poised to redevelop, and most of whom have expressed a willingness to be subjected to special taxes to pay for infrastructure needed to support the redevelopment described in the draft Sector Plan. This collaboration and recognition of the need for a funding district which must have a high degree of participation and stability is a key ingredient to the success of the Sector Plan. However, while the timing and nature of any public finance vehicle is of the utmost importance, the actual public finance vehicle does **not** belong in the Sector Plan, a thirty to forty year planning tool. The County must retain full flexibility over its financial planning rather than cede it to a static document.

The County Executive supports the establishment of a public finance mechanism that can fund a portion of the needed infrastructure. However, the Executive does not support a TIF or tax incremental financing for the reasons spelled out in his comments – it reduces the flexibility to apply funds from the general fund because they are pledged to specific infrastructure; it goes against the limits of Charter Section 305; bonds issued under TIF financing need to be paid even if development and resulting revenues do not occur; and it relieves developers of their share of the overall tax burden leaving remaining taxpayers to pick up a greater share. There are public finance vehicles that can be used to fund public infrastructure without running afoul of these

important considerations. Executive staff will discuss the options and considerations with the Council during worksessions on this Plan.

Beyond the public financing vehicle, this plan calls for approximately \$57 Million of County investment in the very near future – possibly as early as 2012. This investment may be well justified given the projected average net annual fiscal impacts of \$131 Million, however the need for this sum comes at an unparalleled time in the history of Montgomery County with increasing demands on significantly reduced funds. To fit this into the CIP, other priorities will need to be shifted. There must be absolute certainty that the development for which such infrastructure will be required will occur. There simply is not the luxury to have one proceed without the other and coordination of public and private investment will be essential.

The County Executive supports the aggressive mode share proposed by the draft plan and accordingly, encourages working with Metro to advance construction of the second entrance at the White Flint Metro Station. Mr. Leggett will work to achieve, and hopefully exceed, the forecasted mode share. However, it is important to keep in mind the consequences to area roads and County residents if the mode split is not achieved. So, while we must aim high, we must also be prepared if we fall short of the target. Balancing development to mode split realized and road capacity must remain an integral element of the White Flint Sector Plan.

Congestion is an issue that must be part of the discussion. Mr. Leggett does not oppose an expansion of the Metro Station Policy Area, but is concerned about the breadth of the proposed expansion in the draft Plan and the additional congestion generated by this expansion. The expanded reach of the Metro Station Policy Area will have intersection CLVs of 1800 which will result in a significant impact upon performance of intersections within the expanded area.

The County Executive believes that the Plan's orientation to transit, reliance on usage of surface parking lots, and focus on walkability are exactly right. The implementation and financing must be carefully considered and carried out so that the objectives are achieved. Successful implementation of the Plan must result in a better quality of life for those within the Plan area without sacrificing the quality of life for others in the County. Mr. Leggett is committed to working with the Council, the Planning Board, the developers and the communities to ensure just such an outcome.